

Message Text

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SUBJECT: RANDAL ARTICLE

1. FOLLOWING STORIES APPEARED FRONT PAGE AUGUST 17
WASHINGTON POST AND NEW YORK TIMES.

2. AP REPORTER LAYS BEATING TO AFRICAN EMPEROR BOKASSA
NEW YORK AUGUST 10(AP) - MICHAEL GOLDSMITH VETERAN
ASSOCIATED PRESS FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT, SAID TONIGHT THAT
HE WAS BEATEN AND SHACKLED AT TIMES DURING 30 DAYS OF
IMPRISONMENT IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN EMPIRE.

GOLDSMITH WAS ARRESTED JULY 14 WHILE ON ASSIGNMENT THERE
AND RELEASED SUNDAY, AUG. 14.

"SHORTLY AFTER MY ARREST, I WAS BROUGHT BEFORE EMPEROR
BOKASSA I, RULER OF THE COUNTRY, WHO WITHOUT ANY WARNING
OR EXPLANATION OR ATTEMPT TO INTERROGATE ME, STRUCK ME
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ACROSS THE FOREHEAD WITH A HEAVY STICK, CAUSING A SEVERE
WOUND," GOLDSMITH SAID.

"THIS WAS AT THE ROYAL PALACE IN BERENGO, ABOUT 70 MILES
SOUTHWEST OF THE CAPITAL OF BANGUI, IN THE PRESENCE AT
LEAST ONE OF HIS SONS AND SEVERAL MEMBERS OF HIS ENTOURAGE.
AFTER I WAS STRUCK, I WAS KICKED UNCONSCIOUS BY MEMBERS OF
HIS GROUP." GOLDSMITH SAID HE WAS RETURNED TO BANGUI AND
KEPT HANDCUFFED AND CHAINED IN A SMALL CELL WHILE HIS
WOUNDS, INCLUDING THE FOREHEAD GASH, WENT UNATTENDED

FOR SEVERAL DAYS AND BECAME SERIOUSLY INFECTED.

AFTER A WEEK TREATMENT BECAME BETTER, GOLDSMITH SAID.
HE RECEIVED MEDICAL ATTENTION, HIS HANDCUFFS AND LEG
CHAINS WERE REMOVED AND HE WAS GIVEN SATISFACTORY MEALS.

GOLDSMITH, 55, A BRITISH CITIZEN, SAID HE WAS TOLD HE
WAS ARRESTED BECAUSE HE WAS SUSPECTED OF BEING A SPY FOR
SOUTH AFRICA SENT AS A CONTACT MAN.

GOLDSMITH SAID THIS ACCUSATION APPARENTLY RESULTED FROM
HIS FILING A DISPATCH FROM BANGUI TO JOHANNESBURG DEALING
WITH BOKASSA AND HIS PLANS FOR HIS CORONATION ON DEC. 4.

GOLDSMITH SAID HE WAS UNAWARE DURING HIS IMPRISONMENT THAT
JONATHAN RANDAL, AN AMERICAN CITIZEN AND CORRESPONDENT
FOR THE WASHINGTON POST, HAD BEEN ARRESTED AT ABOUT THE
SAME TIME BUT RELEASED A WEEK LATER.

WASHINGTON, AUGUST 16 - THE STATE DEPARTMENT SENT THREE
FORMAL NOTES AND MADE A NUMBER OF ORAL REPRESENTATIONS
THROUGH VARIOUS CHANNELS ON BEHALF OF TWO JOURNALISTS,
ONE AMERICAN AND THE OTHER BRITISH, WHO WERE RECENTLY
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IMPRISONED IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN EMPIRE, OFFICIALS SAID
TODAY.

ONE OF THE PROTESTS WAS MADE DIRECTLY BY THE UNITED STATES
AMBASSADOR, ANTHONY QUANTON, TO EMPEROR BOKASSA, THE
ONE-TIME FRENCH ARMY SERGEANT WHO HAS RULED THE TINY
AFRICAN COUNTRY WITH AN IRON HAND FOR NEARLY 12 YEARS AND
WHO CHANGED IT FROM A REPUBLIC TO AN EMPIRE LAST DECEMBER.

ONE OF THE JOURNALISTS WAS JONATHAN C. RANDAL, AN
AMERICAN CORRESPONDENT IN AFRICA FOR THE WASHINGTON POST.
HE WAS HELD FOR A WEEK IN JULY AND THEN BROUGHT, "BARE-
FOOT, UNSHAVEN AND MANACLED," AS HE PUT IT, BEFORE THE
EMPEROR IN THE PRESENCE OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS BEFORE
BEING RELEASED TO THE UNITED STATES CHARGE D'AFFAIRES,
GRANT SMITH.

THE OTHER WAS MICHAEL GOLDSMITH, A BRITISH REPORTER FOR
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, WHO, LIKE MR. RANDAL, WAS ARRESTED
JULY 14 IN THE CAPITAL OF BANGUI AND HELD FOR A MONTH
UNTIL HIS RELEASE YESTERDAY.

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS WERE VERY RELUCTANT TO TALK
ABOUT THE PROTESTS, WHICH WERE MADE WITHOUT PUBLICITY BE-
CAUSE OF CONCERN FOR THE FATE OF THE JOURNALISTS SHOULD
THE EMPEROR BE FURTHER PROVOKED.

EVEN WITH THE JOURNALISTS SAFELY OUT OF THE COUNTRY, THE STATE DEPARTMENT RESPONDED CAUTIOUSLY TO INQUIRIES ABOUT THE AFFAIR, IN PART BECAUSE SEVERAL HUNDRED AMERICANS, INCLUDING ABOUT 150 MISSIONARIES AND DEPENDENTS AND 60 PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS, REMAIN IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN EMPIRE.

AS A MATTER OF POLICY, THE STATE DEPARTMENT DOES NOT TRY TO DISCOURAGE AMERICANS FROM VISITING EMPEROR BOKASSA'S
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COUNTRY AND MANY DO SO EACH YEAR SINCE BANGUI IS ON THE MAIN ROUTE FOR TRAVELERS CROSSING SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, OFFICIALS SAID.

AMBASSADOR QUANTON, A 43-YEAR OLD CAREER DIPLOMAT ON HIS FIRST ASSIGNMENT AS A CHIEF OF MISSION, PRESENTED HIS CREDENTIALS TO EMPEROR BOKASSA, WHO THEN HELD THE TITLE PRESIDENT-FOR-LIFE, ON FEBRUARY 19, 1976. MR. QUANTON WAS ON LEAVE IN THE UNITED STATES WHEN THE TWO JOURNALISTS WERE ARRESTED, BUT RETURNED TO HIS POST TO PERSONALLY DELIVER ONE OF THE PROTESTS TO THE EMPEROR.

IN MR. QUANTON'S ABSENCE, MR. SMITH, WHO WAS IN CHARGE OF THE AMERICAN EMBASSY, ATTENDED THE EMPEROR'S BIZARRE CONVOCAION JULY 21 AT THE IMPERIAL COURT AT BERENGO, 40 MILES SOUTHWEST OF BANGUI, AND IN WHOSE CUSTODY MR. RANDAL WAS RELEASED FOR IMMEDIATE DEPORTATION.

"PRESENT ALONG WITH THE DIPLOMATS IN THE AUDITORIUM-LIKE BUILDING WHERE I WAS PRODUCED AS EXHIBIT A WERE BOTH OF THE EMPIRE'S CABINETS, ONE FOR ROUTINE GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS AND ONE FOR IMPERIAL AND COURT AFFAIRS," MR. RANDAL WROTE IN AN ARTICLE PRINTED IN THE POST TODAY.

"HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY, DRESSED IN A DARK LEISURE SUITE AND OCCASIONALLY RINGING A SMALL BELL LIKE A PRIEST OFFICIATING AT A MASS," MR. RANDAL WROTE, "DENOUNCED ME AS A SPY, THEN ALMOST IMMEDIATELY EXONERATED ME, CHARGED THAT THE UNITED STATES IS BEHIND ALL AFRICA'S TROUBLES AND BANNED AMERICAN TOURISTS, THEN RELENTED.

"FINALLY, AS I WAS PHOTOGRAPHED AND FILMED, I WAS TURNED OVER TO THE AMERICAN CHARGE D'AFFAIRES AND ORDERED EXPELL-
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ED."

MR. RANDAL'S ARTICLE WAS WITHHELD FROM PUBLICATION BY THE POST FOR THREE WEEKS UNTIL MR. GOLDSMITH ALSO WAS RELEASED. HE WAS CHARGED WITH BEING A SPY FOR SOUTH AFRICA. THE POST CORRESPONDENT SAID HE WAS "NEVER PHYSICALLY MISTREATED", ALTHOUGH HE WAS ONCE THREATENED BY A DRUNKEN POLICE LIEUTENANT FOR INSISTING THAT HE BE ALLOWED TO CONTACT THE AMERICAN CONSUL.

FOR THE FIRST NIGHT AND DAY, IN THE FIRST OF TWO PRISONS IN WHICH HE WAS HELD, HE WAS "STRIPPED OF SHORTS, SOCKS AND SHOES AND KEPT IN A TINY CELL JUST LARGE ENOUGH TO ALLOW ITS FIVE OCCUPANTS TO LIE DOWN". CENTRAL AFRICAN PRISONERS WERE ROUTINELY BEATEN, HE SAID.

RON KOVEN, FOREIGN EDITOR OF THE POST, SAID TODAY THAT ALTHOUGH THERE HAD BEEN "LITTLE DIFFERENCES" BETWEEN THE NEWSPAPER AND THE STATE DEPARTMENT ON TACTICAL QUESTIONS "I AM ABSOLUTE SATISFIED THAT THEY WERE DOING THEIR BEST AND ACTING WITH AS MUCH DISPATCH AS POSSIBLE".

AMERICAN OFFICIALS BECAME INVOLVED IN MR. GOLDSMITH'S CASE ONLY AT THE REQUEST OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS AND AFTER A BRITISH CONSUL, WHO FLEW IN FROM NEIGHBORING CAMEROON, HAD BEEN REFUSED PERMISSION TO SEE MR. GOLDSMITH AND HAD HIS CHARTERED PLANE TEMPORARILY IMPOUNDED, BRITAIN HAS NO FORMAL RELATIONS WITH THE CENTRAL AFRICAN EMPIRE.

IT WAS A PROTEST ABOUT MR. GOLDSMITH'S DETENTION FROM KEITH FULLER, PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, THAT AMBASSADOR QUAINTON DELIVERED TO EMPEROR BOKASSA IN HIS AUDIENCE ON AUGUST 1. THE A.P. YESTERDAY QUOTED THIS RESPONSE FROM THE EMPEROR: "I HAVE NO REPLY TO MAKE TO HIM. AMERICAN JOURNALISTS SHOULD STAY HOME AND STOP WRIT-LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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ING ABOUT ALLEGED MISDEEDS OF BOKASSA".

THE EMPEROR HAD INSISTED AT THE BERENGO CONVOCATION THAT BOTH MR. GOLDSMITH AND MR. RANDAL WERE GUILTY OF VIOLATING A 1975 LAW REQUIRING ALL FOREIGN JOURNALISTS TO REGISTER WITH THE POLICE CHIEF AND DEPOSIT DOLLARS 400, MR. RANDAL WROTE.

HIS ARTICLE SAID THAT DURING THE CONVOCATION, WHICH LAST-ED MORE THAN TWO HOURS, MR. GOLDSMITH'S DISPATCH ABOUT THE EMPEROR'S PREPARATIONS FOR HIS CORONATION IN DECEMBER WAS DENOUNCED AS "ERRONEOUS, EXAGGERATED AND DEFAMATORY", AND AS CONSTITUTING "ESPIONAGE" AND A PLOT TO "UNDERMINE STATE SECURITY".

EMPEROR BOKASSA HAS OFTEN DENOUNCED FOREIGN JOURNALISTS FOR THE WAY IN WHICH THEY HAVE REPORTED HIS BEHAVIOR. ONE OF THE MORE RECENT SUCH OCCASIONS CONCERNED HIS TRANSFORMATION OF HIS COUNTRY OF 1.6 MILLION FROM REPUBLIC TO EMPIRE, WITH THE CORRESPONDING CHANGE IN HIS TITLE.

ACCORDING TO MR. RANDAL, HOWEVER, EMPEROR BOKASSA "DESPERATELY WANTS" THE WIDEST POSSIBLE FOREIGN COVERAGE OF HIS CORONATION IN DECEMBER "AND HOPES TO HAVE THE PROCEEDINGS TELEVISED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD."

BUT MR. KOVEN SAID TODAY THAT THE WASHINGTON POST WOULD FIRST HAVE TO DETERMINE "WHETHER WE CONSIDER THE CORONATION NEWSWORTHY ENOUGH" AND, IF SO, WHETHER ADEQUATE ASSURANCES ABOUT ITS CORRESPONDENT'S SAFETY COULD BE OBTAINED FROM EMPEROR BOKASSA'S GOVERNMENT.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT SAID TODAY THAT NO DECISION HAD YET LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
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BEEN TAKEN ON THE QUESTION OF SENDING AN OFFICIAL UNITED STATES DELEGATION TO THE CORONATION.

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS SAID TODAY THAT PART OF THE TROUBLES ENCOUNTERED BY AMERICAN AND WESTERN JOURNALISTS IN AFRICA DERIVES FROM THE BELIEF OF AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS THAT THE CORRESPONDENTS WERE CONTROLLED BY THEIR RESPECTIVE GOVERNMENTS AND THAT CRITICAL REPORTING WAS THUS OFTEN TAKEN AS OFFICIAL CRITICISM.

AS AN EXAMPLE, IT WAS LEARNED THAT CHRISTOPHE MAIDOU, THE AMBASSADOR OF THE CENTRAL AFRICAN EMPIRE TO THE UNITED STATES, HAD TODAY TELEPHONED NOT THE WASHINGTON POST, BUT A STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIAL TO COMPLAIN THAT MR. RANDAL'S ARTICLE WOULD NOT BE BENEFICIAL TO RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

HONORS, WEALTH, WIVES-AFRICAN EMPEROR HAS TASTE FOR RECOGNITION. PARIS - ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS A LAND-LOCKED FRENCH COLONY IN THE VERY HEART OF AFRICA CALLED OUBANGUI-SHARI, WHICH WAS BEST KNOWN TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD FOR SUPPLYING PLATTER-LIPPED WOMEN TO THE CIRCUS SIDESHOWS.

THE FRENCH LEFT IN 1960, AND IN THE BLAZE OF AFRICAN INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATIONS OF THAT YEAR THE COUNTRY DECLARED ITSELF THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC.

BY THEN THE FRENCH, IN THE NAME OF CIVILIZATION, HAD STAMPED OUT THE HABIT OF DISTORTING WOMEN'S FEATURES, SO THE COUNTRY WAS NOT REALLY KNOWN FOR ANYTHING AT ALL.

BUT LAST DECEMBER ITS RULER, NO NONSENSE, MUCH-DECORATED
FORMER FRENCH COLONIAL ARMY CAPTAIN NAMED JEAN-BEDEL
BOKASSA, 56, DECIDED TO DECLARE HIMSELF EMPEROR OF HIS
2 MILLION CENTRAL AFRICAN SUBJECTS WHO LIVE IN A LAND AS
BIG AS TEXAS.

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PEOPLE IN AFRICA AND ELSEWHERE SUDDENLY TOOK AN INTEREST
IN HIS POTENTIALLY RICH (URANIUM, DIAMONDS, COFFEE,
COTTON) - NATION, WHICH MUCH TO HIS ANNOYANCE IS LISTED
BY THE UNITED NATIONS AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S 25 POOREST.

SWEPT ASIDE WERE THE AWKWARD REALITIES OF UNPARALLELED
FINANCIAL MISMANAGEMENT - IN PART DISGUISED BY GENEROUS
FRENCH GOVERNMENT AID AMOUNTING TO A THIRD OF THE
THE COUNTRY'S DOLLARS 94 MILLION BUDGET- AND BOKASSA'S
MERCURIAL PENCHANT FOR REVOLVING-DOOR GOVERNMENTS.

IN CREATING THE EMPIRE, BOKASSA WAS CAPPING AN
EXTRAORDINARY DESTINY OF A MAN ORPHANED AT 6, EDUCATED BY
CATHOLIC MISSIONARIES, AN AUTHENTIC FRENCH ARMY WAR HERO
WHO, SINCE SEIZING POWER IN 1965 NEW YEAR'S EVE COUP,
HAS ACCUMULATED HONORS, RICHES, FAME AND THE LOVE OF
WOMEN.

ALTHOUGH HE BRIDLES AT THE SUGGESTION, THERE ARE THOSE
WHO INSIST THE EMPIRE WAS CREATED TO GIVE HIMSELF AND HIS
ERRATIC RULE A SENSE OF LEGITIMACY, CONTINUITY, AND
RESPECT THAT IT AND SO MANY OTHER AFRICAN REGIMES LACK.

WAS IT MEGALOMANIA OR A DEEP-SEATED SENSE OF INSECURITY
THAT LED HIM - LIKE SO MANY OF HIS AFRICAN PEERS - TO PUT
HIS OWN FEATURES ON THE COUNTRY'S BANK NOTES, BUILD TWO
STATUES TO HIMSELF AND ATTACH HIS NAME TO EVERYTHING FROM
AN AVENUE AND A SPORTS STADIUM TO A MARKET, THE FLEDGLING
UNIVERSITY AND ARMY HEADQUARTERS?

TO BE SURE, HE DEFERS BOTH TO HIS "SPIRITUAL FATHER,"
PRESIDENT FELIX-HOUPHOUET-BOIGNY OF THE CONSERVATIVE
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IVORY COAST, AND TO HIS "YOUNGER BROTHER," PRESIDENT
MOBUTU SESE SEKO OF THE NEIGHBORING ZAIRE.

BUT SO TAKEN IS BOKASSA WITH HONORS THAT HE ONCE HAD AN
EXTRA-LONG COAT DESIGNED TO ACCOMMODATE HIS MANY MEDALS,
WHICH INCLUDE ONE FROM AN INTERNATIONAL STAMP COLLECTORS

GROUP AND ANOTHER FROM A FRENCH POLICE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION.

AS FOR HIS WEALTH, EVEN THOSE BEST DISPOSED TOWARD HIM- AND THE FEAR HE INSPIRES IS SUFFICIENT TO PREVENT CRITICS FROM SPEAKING UP - CONCEDE THAT IS PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE TO DISCERN WHERE THE RICKETY STATE FINANCES END AND HIS IMPRESSIVE PERSONAL FORTUNE BEGINS.

HIS TASTE IN WOMEN IS ECLECTIC. HE IS PROUD OF HIS THREE WIVES, 30 LEGITIMATE CHILDREN AND CONSIDERABLE NUMBER OF MISTRESSES.

THE TWO MOST PROMINENT WOMEN IN HIS LIFE ARE CATHERINE, A CENTRAL AFRICAN IN HER LATE 20S WHO IS KNOWN AS THE EMPRESS, AND GABRIELLE, A BEAUTIFUL ROMANIAN BLONDE OF SIMILAR YEARS. BEFORE THE EMPIRE'S CREATION, CATHERINE WAS ENTITLED LA MARECHALE AND GABRIELLE WAS LA PRESIDENTE.

DESPITE HIS MOODINESS AND PENCHANT FOR THE ARBITRARY, BOKASSA'S REPUTATION AS FRENCH-SPEAKING AFRICA'S EQUIVALENT OF UGANDAN PRESIDENT IDI AMIN IS UNDESERVED. BOKASSA'S ONLY KNOWN FORAY INTO GRATUITOUS VIOLENCE-IF EXECUTING WOULD-BE ASSASSINS CAN LEGITIMATELY BE EXCEPTED-INVOLVED HIS DECISION IN 1972 TO BEAT PRISONERS IN PUBLIC AS A WARNING AGAINST A RISING RATE OF THEFT IN BANGUI.

AT LEAST THREE PRISONERS DIED-AND MANY OTHERS WERE BADLY INJURED-IN THE 10-MINUTE ASSAULT IN WHICH BOKASSA, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SURROUNDED BY HIS CABINET, URGED POLICEMEN TO LIGHT INTO THE THIEVES WITH CLUBS AND RIFLE BUTTS. THE VICTIMS LATER WERE LEFT EXPOSED FOR HOURS IN THE UNFORGIVING EQUATORIAL AFRICAN SUN.

NOT ONLY HAS HE SINCE ESCHEWED SUCH VIOLENCE-ALTHOUGH HE STILL HAS HIS CITIZENS ARRESTED ON THE FLIMSIEST OF PRETEXTS-BUT HE HAS ALSO PROVED TO BE REMARKABLY FORGIVING. THERE ARE BELIEVED TO BE FEWER THAN 20 POLITICAL PRISONERS. MINISTERS WHO SIN-ESPECIALLY AGAINST THE PUBLIC TREASURY-ARE OFTEN JAILED, BUT LIKELY TO BE GIVEN EVEN BETTER JOBS. EVEN DAVID DACKO, THE PRESIDENT- AND COUSIN-THAT BOKASSA UNSEATED IN 1965, HAS BEEN RESTORED. HIS FULL PRESIDENTIAL SALARY WAS RESTORED AND HE IS WORKING AS ONE OF THE EMPEROR'S CLOSEST ADVISERS.

BOKASSA JUSTIFIED HIS COUP BY EXPELLING THE COMMUNIST CHINESE HE CLAIMED WERE UNDERMINING THE DACKO REGIME. LAST YEAR, BOKASSA INVITED THE CHINESE BACK IN.

WHATEVER HIS DOMESTIC SHORTCOMINGS HE HAS PROVED HIMSELF AN ADEPT PRACTITIONER OF NONALIGNMENT IN FOREIGN POLICY. NOT ONLY DOES HE MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL OF HIS NEIGHBORS BUT 28 COUNTRIES MAINTAIN DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS HERE.

HE KEEPS BOTH AN ISRAELI AND AN ARAB AS PERSONAL ADVISERS. THE ISRAELI TAKES CARE OF ISRAELI DIAMOND INTERESTS AND QUESTIONS INVOLVING SOUTH AFRICA, WHICH INVESTS AS MUCH AS DOLLARS 4 MILLION ANNUALLY WITHOUT GETTING MUCH TO SHOW FOR IT. THE ARAB HAS PROVEN USEFUL IN ATTRACTING SUCH ARAB AID AS THE 45,000 TONS OF OIL IRAQ HAS AGREED TO GIVE THE EMPIRE.

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BOKASSA APPEARS TO GIVE UP VERY LITTLE IN RETURN. A VISIT LAST FALL BY LIBYAN LEADER MUAMMAR QADDAFI PROVOKED AN INSTANT RELIGIOUS CONVERSION OF JEAN-BEDEL INTO SALAH EDDINE BOKASSA. BUT, WHEN CERTAIN FINANCIAL PROMISES FAILED MATERIALIZE, HE REVERTED TO HIS CHRISTIANITY EVER SO BRIEFLY BEFORE PROCLAIMING HIMSELF EMPEROR.

NOT EVERYONE IN AFRICA-OR FOR THAT MATTER IN THIS SLEEPY RIVERSIDE CAPITAL WAS AMUSED BY THE IMPERIAL DECISION. ACROSS THE CONTINENT, NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES HEAPED S-ORN ON THE CREATION OF THE EMPIRE.

HERE, OPPOSITION WAS BASED ON THE WESTERN-TRAINED ELITE'S FEELING THAT THE OUTSIDE WORLD WOULD HOLD THE COUNTRY TO RIDICULE. (AS FOR THE 80 PER CENT OF THE CITIZENRY LIV-ING IN THE BUSH, IT WAS ASSUMED THAT THEY COULD NOT CARE LESS IF BOKASSA CALLED HIMSELF KING, EMPEROR OR PRESIDENT, SINCE CENTRAL AFRICAN NOTIONS OF POWER ARE AT BEST HAZY).

LOCAL OPPOSITION TOOK THE FORM OF A DELAYING ACTION BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNTRY'S SINGLE PARTY. THEY STRETCHED OUT A PLANNED THREE-DAY CONGRESS TO NEARLY A MONTH BEFORE CAVING INTO BOKASSA'S DESIRE.

IN EXCHANGE, THE PARTY EXTRACTED THE FIRST-AND ON PAPER VERY LIBERAL-CONSTITUTION-THE COUNTRY HAD KNOW SINCE BOKASSA SEIZED POWER AND ABOLISHED ALL GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS IN FAVOR OF ABSOLUTE RULE.

IF MOST OF THE COUNTRY'S ELITE ABANDONED THEIR REPUBLICAN IDEALS WITH REMARKABLE EASE, A COMPARISON OF THE LIST OF GOVERNMENT MINISTERS BEFORE AND AFTER THE EMPIRE'S PROCLAMATION DEMONSTRATES THAT THE DECISION WAS NOT UNIVERSALLY APPROVED.

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THE EXACT REASONS PROMPTING BOKASSA TO PROCLAIM HIS EMPIRE HAVE NEVER BEEN SPELLED OUT, BUT FOREIGN AND CENTRAL AFRICAN OBSERVERS WERE LONG AWARE HE WAS TOYING WITH THE PROJECT.

SOME SUGGEST HE CARRIED OUT A PREEMPTIVE STRIKE TO PREVENT SOME OTHER AFRICAN LEADER FROM INHERITING THE IMPERIAL MANTLE LEFT VACANT IN AFRICA WHEN ETHIOPIA'S LATE EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE WAS DEPOSED IN 1974. THERE ARE STRIKING SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE CORONATION PREPARATIONS NOW GOING ON HERE AND THOSE THE LATE EVELYN WAUGH DESCRIBED IN "BLACK MISCHIEF", HIS CLASSIC DESCRIPTION OF HAILE SELASSIE'S CORONATION IN 1930.

" " -

OTHER OBSERVERS TRACE THE WHOLE THING TO HIS REVERENCE FOR NAPOLEON, HARDLY SURPRISING IN AN UNABASHED FRANCO-PHILE WHO ROSE THROUGH THE RANKS IN 23 YEARS OF FRENCH COLONIAL ARMY SERVICE.

THEY NOTE THAT HIS OFFICIAL PORTRAIT AS PRESIDENT FOR LIFE-WHICH ALONG WITH FIELD MARSHAL ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THE MANY TITLES HE BESTOWED UPON HIMSELF BEFORE THAT OF EMPEROR-SHOWED HIM DECKED OUT IN THE DRESS UNIFORM OF A NAPOLEONIC GENERAL, COMPLETE WITH COCKED HAT.

YET THE EMPEROR DRESSES SIMPLY AND NEVER DEPARTS FROM THE DIRECT, PUNGENT AND OFTEN EMOTIONAL LANGUAGE HE LEARNED IN THE FRENCH ARMY.

WITH HIS CORONATION PLANNED FOR DEC. 4, THE EMPEROR RECENTLY HAS EMERGED FROM SEMI-RETIREMENT AT BERENGO, SEAT OF THE IMPERIAL COURT 40 MILES DOWN ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S TWO MAIN PAVED ROADS FROM THE CAPITAL. IN PAST
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MONTHS HE HAS WITHDRAWN FROM THE DAILY BUSINESS OF GOVERNMENT, WHICH ONCE INVOLVED HOLDING PERSONALLY 14 MINISTERIAL PORTFOLIOS AND SIGNING ALL GOVERNMENT CHECKS.

BOKASSA IS OVERSEEING EVERY DETAIL OF THE CORONATION PLANS WITH MINISTERS OF THE IMPERIAL COURT, WHO HAVE MORE POWER THAN THE CABINET.

EMPRESS CATHERINE HAS BEEN IN PARIS FOR WEEKS MAKING SURE THAT THE CONSIDERABLE AND COMPLICATED ORDERS ARRIVE ON TIME. MINISTERS COMMUTE BACK AND FORTH FROM FRANCE ON

SIMILAR MISSIONS.

NO FEWER THAN 23 COMMITTEES ARE HARD AT WORK PLANNING EVERYTHING FROM HOUSING AND MEDICAL FACILITIES FOR 2,000 GUESTS TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF TRIUMPHAL ARCHES.

THE CORONATION IS EXPECTED TO COST ANYWHERE FROM DOLLARS 8 MILLION TO 20 MILLION. AT GOVERNMENT SUGGESTION, THREE FOREIGN DIAMOND COMPANIES EACH CONTRIBUTED DOLLARS 100,000 APIECE AND OTHER MAINLY FOREIGN-OWNED BUSINESSES ARE EXPECTED TO CONTRIBUTE AS MUCH AS DOLLARS 2 MILLION.

THE BIGGEST ITEM IS HIW CROWN-FEATURING EMERALDS AND RUBIES AND AS MANY AS 8,000 CENTRAL AFRICAN DIAMONDS. THE STONES ARE BEING ROUGH-CUT HERE BEFORE BEING FINISHED IN PARIS BY AN ESTABLISHED JEWELER. ITS MARKET VALUE IS ESTIMATED AT DOLLARS 5 MILLION. ALSO ON ORDER ARE A CARRIAGE-TO BE DRAWN BY EIGHT HORSES

AND 1,0 NORMAN HORSES WHOSE CENTRAL AFRICAN RIDERS ARE BEING TRAINED IN FRANCE.

THE THRONE, IN THE FORM OF AN EAGLE IN FLIGHT, IS BEING DONE IN FRANCE, AS IS HIS CORONATION UNIFORM. IT IS BEING MADE IN THE TOWN OF DREUX BY A FIRM SPECIALIZING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN CEREMONIAL GEAR.

SO FAR, THE EMPEROR'S ONLY SETBACK HAS BEEN A POLITE TURNDOWN TO HIS OVERTURES TO THE VATICAN TO HAVE THE POPE-OR EVEN A CARDINAL-OFFICATE AT THE CORONATION.

ANOTHER UNCERTAIN STARTER IS FRENCH PRESIDENT VALERY GISCARD D'ESTAING, AN OLD BOKASSA FAN WHO HAS INDULGED HIS PENCHANT FOR WILD GAME HUNTING IN THE EMPIRE. GISCARD HAS A MOST DELICATE GENERAL ELECTIONS ON HIS HANDS NEXT SPRING AND MAY WELL DECIDE HIS PRESENCE HERE COULD ONLY ALIENATE FRENCH VOTERS.

ALTHOUGH NO OFFICIAL SCHEDULE HAS BEEN SET, IT HAS BEEN ANNOUNCED THAT BOKASSA WILL CROWN HIMSELF DEC. 4 IN THE YUGOSLAV-BUILT COVERED BASKETBALL COURT SEATING 6,000 WHERE HE WAS PROCLAIMED EMPEROR LAST YEAR.

A RELIGIOUS CEREMONY WILL TAKE PLACE LATER THE SAME DAY IN THE RED BRICK CATHEDRAL SEATING 3,000.

THE FOLLOWING DAY WILL BE GIVEN OVER TO A PARADE FEATURING THE CARRIAGE AND HORSEMEN, TO BE FOLLOWED BY A SITDOWN DINNER FOR THE EMPEROR'S GUESTS.

ALTHOUGH THE COUNTRY'S ANNUAL PER CAPITA INCOME IS ONLY
DOLLARS 179, FEW CENTRAL AFRICAN HAVE CRITICIZED THE
OUTLAY FOR THE CORONATION. RECORD HIGH COFFEE PRICES
HAVE PROVED A WINDFALL WHICH WILL COVER MUCH OF THE
COSTS.

AS A WISE, IF CYNICAL, CENTRAL AFRICAN NOTED PRIVATELY:
"IF BOKASSA DIDN'T WASTE THE MONEY ON A CORONATION IT
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WOULD BE WASTED ON SOMETHING ELSE."

3. DECONTROL UPON RECEIPT. VANCE

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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t197708117/baaaetnv.tel
Line Count: 561
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 37e85751-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ORIGIN AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 11
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1445903
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RANDAL ARTICLE
TAGS: PFOR, SOPN, CT, US, (RANDALL), (GOLDSMITH, MICHAEL)
To: BANGUI
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/37e85751-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009